1974

Oral History Interview: Joseph Clair Nelson

Joseph Clair Nelson

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Date 2 July 1974

J. C. Nelson
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Date 2 July 1974

Marshall Graduate
(Signature - Witness)

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J. C. NELSON Ret.

HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA

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An Interview With

Mr. Joseph Clair Nelson

Conducted by

Dr. Michael J. Galgano

July 2, 1974

Transcribed by

Susan J. Hutchison

MJG: This interview is being conducted with Mr. Joseph Clair Nelson of Huntington, West Virginia. Mr. Nelson was born at Alexander Station in Canton County, Kentucky, on the 11th of May, 1888. He was an employee of the C & O Railroad for more than 64 years until his retirement on January 1, 1971. The interview is being conducted by Michael J. Galgano. The date is the second of July, 1974. Mr. Nelson, could you tell me, ah, what it was like growing up in Canton County, Kentucky? Ah, was it a farming community or?

JCN: Well, it was a farming community. Fact there wasn't any community. There was just a couple of houses there. My grandmother lived down the road probably, ah, three or four hundred yards from where I was born. I was born in a two-room log cabin.

MJG: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

JCN: I had, ah, one sister died before I was born. She was eight years old. And, ah, I had one sister born after me, and she's also dead now. But, ah, the, ah, road to Covington about, I was about three years old /MJG: Uh huh./, and that's where we, I finally grew up and.

MJG: What were the schools like in Covington? What kind of school did you go to?

JCN: Well, we had, ah, we had good schools. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, I, ah, went to school through the second grade, and then when the family moved out on, ah, Dixie Highway, which is Route 25 today, and that would be out in the county, and I went to, ah, a couple of years to, ah, one-room schoolhouse. /MG: Uh huh./ Was about three quarters of a mile from where we lived.

MJG: Did you get there by walking or did you ride a horse or what?

JCN: Yeah, walking, that's right. An old dusty turnpike. And, ah, then we moved back to Covington, and they put me right back to where I left off. So that, that caused me to lose two years schooling, and, ah, I went through the sixth grade, and then I went to work.

MJG: Ah, when you say the sixth grade, what year would that be in /JCN: Ah./ roughly? Was it before the turn of the century?

JCN: Well. Was it before what?

MJG: Was it before 1900 that you left school?

JCN: Mmm. Just about that.

MJG: And, you went to work then for.

JCN: I went to work for L & N Railroad as a messenger boy.

MJG: Ah, was this in Covington?

JCN: Yeah. My dad and my uncle worked there. And, ah, I got the big sum of $15 a month, six days a week, about ten hours a day. /MG: Uh huh./ And, I worked that for nine months, and I got a promotion to yard clerk. That paid $45 a month.

MJG: Ah, what was the yard clerk's responsibilities? What, what did you do on your job?

JCN: I, ah, well, you see, where I worked, where I worked was a freight office /MJG: Uh huh./, and the yard clerk job was, ah, to check all the cars around in that area of the freight house, see when they was unloaded to see that, ah, the shippers got them unloaded in time. If they didn't, why, they was charged demurrage, you know, $2 a day, I believe, everyday over 24 hours.

MJG: Well, what sorts of things were shipped through Covington on the railroad when you were working as this clerk?

JCN: Well, this was, this was, ah, mostly local freight stuff, you know. You could ship anything at that day and time. Local. Household goods or just anything they wanted to ship. And, we got, ah, in the tobacco season, we got a lot of tobacco in there in little small 50-ton boxcars hold, ah, about eight or nine hogsheads of tobacco at one time. And, there was a lot of that coming at that time. And, ah, it was hauled in drays. That's a two-horse, ah, cart sort of a thing. And, they'd lay three of these hogsheads of tobacco on there, and they'd take those to Cincinnati to a tobacco company there.

MJG: Uh huh. What kinds of engines were used at the time. What, could you describe them?

JCN: Well, ah, they was, ah, the one that they used around there, switching service was, ah, ah, a little six-wheel engine, six drives, three drives on each side. And, ah, that was the only L & N Locomotive at that time. They didn't have to be very big to do that kind of work, you know. Back from Latonia, Kentucky, down to Covington was, ah, where these house cars they had, and, ah, some they had put on team tracks; they was solid logs, and people would, ah, shipper would unload the (inaudible). Oh, they'd handle 10, 15 cars, I expect.

MJG: What was the crew of a train at that time for this type of load?

JCN: Well, that was what you called a switching crew. They had, ah, engineer, and a fireman, and a conductor, and two switchmen as helpers. One of them was considered a head man and one a rear man.

MJG: Uh huh. They were not unionized at this time were they?

JCN: Mmm, no, not the L & N. The L & N wasn't unionized until World War I. I can't think of that name, ah, MacAdoo. /MJG: Uh huh./ MacAdoo was the one that caused the, that made the L & N organized.

MJG: Uh huh. This went back to, to, ah, ah, how long did you stay as, as clerk, yard clerk? How long did you hold that job as yard clerk?

JCN: I held that for, ah, about three and probably two years. Then I transferred across to Cincinnati as a yard clerk.

MJG: Still with the L & N?

JCN: Yeah. That was a freight house in Cincinnati. And, ah, after that I took a notion that I wanted to get a job firing, and, ah, so I got, I finally go that in, ah, August 1, 1906.

MJG: Ah, was there any special kind of training involved before you got to be a fireman? Before you got into firing?

JCN: I didn't get what.

MJG: Was there any kind of special training that you had to go through?

JCN: Oh, no. The old saying was all you needed was a strong back and a weak mind (laughter). Ah, I was kind of lucky to get a job at, ah, that time. They had, ah, big coal shipper here in Huntington, and I knew him pretty well from association when I was with L & N. I told him one day I wanted to get a job firing on a steam engine. He says, "Oh," says, ah, "I'll give you a good recommendation." Said, "Well, I'd appreciate it." So he had a stenographer write my recommendation, and I, I took it out there to C & O Office, found the road foreman of the office. And, the door was closed, and I knocked on the door, and he said, "Come in." And, he was sitting at the desk writing and, ah, looked around at me. Said, "We don't need any fireman now." Says, "We're full up." I said, ah, "I, ah, have a letter here I would like for you to look at." He said, "All right." He read this letter, reached down and pulled out bottom drawer of his desk, and pulled out a form and put it up there and filled it out, and wanted me to sign. He said, ah, "Now, you'll have to make two or three or maybe four trips for nothing to learn how to fire those burners, burn coal." So that was all right. And, ah, I made four trips, and, ah, I was called to go out on Aug--August 1st by myself. An old boy that I went to school with he was firing there. He'd been firing for some time. He was at the roundhouse, and he said, "Oh, I'll take you out and help you build a fire up and get you started." I said, "All right." So we went on in and got the fire in good shape. He thought it was good shape, which it was, and he started out and that was the longest day I ever put in.

MJG: Where were you going? Do you recall where the destination was?

JCN: Oh, from Covington to Russell down here, and it was 140 miles. The old saying was it was up hill both ways (laughter). Went right along the Ohio River most the way.

MJG: Can you recall the name of the man who wrote the letter of recommendation for you? What was his name?

JCN: Yes. T. W. Spinks, Coal Company. Tom Spinks. He's been gone a long, long time. He was a fine gentleman. Incidentally, my dad helped build this railroad /MJG: Is that right?/ when he was a young man with, ah, railroad at California, Kentucky, about 20 mile east of Cincinnati /MJG: Uh huh./ on the Ohio River.

MJG: Uh huh. Well, how were the workers chosen for, for building it? Was he a farmer who.

JCN: Yeah, he was a, he was on his dad's farm, and that was before he married, of course. And, ah, he had a couple of teams and, and, ah, horse-drawn shovels for grating. /MG: Yes./ And, that's, that's what he had working down there. /MJG: Uh huh./ I guess he worked the probably, ah, five or six miles of the railroad. He could have.

MJG: Uh huh. Did he stay with the railroad once he'd, ah, helped out on the construction?

JCN: No, no, no, he went back to farming, and, ah, he married my mother sometime after that. And, ah, and, ah, before I was born, why, he, he, he worked on the L & N as a section man. At the time I was born he was. /MJG: Uh huh./ He never done much farming after he worked his dad's farm. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, he worked for the L & N up there as a section man, and then he came to Covington. He got a job with the L & N at this freight house that I mentioned /MJG: Uh huh./ a while ago. And, ah, he worked there for a long, long time. And, that job paid a dollar and ten cents a day.

MJG: A day? My goodness.

JCN: That was, that was in, ah, Teddy Roosevelt's time.

MJG: Uh huh. Now, was that considered a decent wage at the time?

JCN: Well, it wasn't as much, that was just common labor /MJG: Uh huh./ pay at that time. Now, I remember the old men wanted to cut them to a dollar a day, and, ah, Teddy Roosevelt told them that they wasn't going to cut wages. That they could, ah, either send their books to Washington or he would send a committee to Louisville to see whether they had to have a ten cent cut. So they never did cut it. And, he never made much more than that. I don't remember just what they did pay. But, ah, we lived, and we never had to go hungry. /MJG: Uh huh./ Plenty of food. Only thing it was a struggle all the time.

MJG: Yeah. When you started to work for C & O as, as a fireman, ah, was your normal run the Covington and Russell, Kentucky run?

JCN: Well, that was, ah, the reason, course I'd, I'd worked as a fireman in the yard. I worked extra for, I was on extra board about three years.

MJG: Uh huh. Now, what exactly did that mean?

JCN: Well, if, ah, they wanted an extra crew and then an extra train or an extra yard engine, then they'd come to this extra board. There was always several firemen on, ah, fireman's board and several engineers on an engineer's board. And, ah, they would use them if one wanted to lay off and, ah, fi they had enough extra men, why, you didn't have much trouble of getting off. /MJG: Uh huh./ That's the reason the extra men was kept around to take these extra jobs and if people got sick and so forth.

MJG: Were you paid extra about your, your, ah, regular wage for this?

JCN: Well, let's see, ah, firing yard engine at that time when I went to work got a dollar and ninety cents a day as a yardman. On a road job, road, ah, job from Covington to Russell paid $3.40 a day. Now, that was 12 hours now. /MJG: Uh huh./ You didn't get into overtime until you got, was on duty 12 hours. That was straight time after that.

MJG: Now, on a run like that, would it be an overnight run or would you go down there and come back, ah, were you away from home overnight on this type of run?

JCN: Oh, yeah. Ah, at that time, the Cincinnati Division was all single track for the exception of about, ah, five miles out of Covington. And, ah, probably two mile of double track through Maysville, and, ah, five mile of double track coming into Russell. And, there was side track about every five, six mile. And, sometimes used every one of them. And, ah, pretty good business those days, and put you in side track and maybe three, four cranes would meet you there, and they couldn't get you off the ground, and, ah, it would prolong the trips. /MJG: Uh huh. Well, engineers./ People, people today, I don't know of any job that was harder /MJG: Uh huh./ than pulling a locomotive behind you. /MJG: Yes./ That's all there was to it. That time was hand-fired locomotives, and, ah, it was, ah, oh, I think it didn't steam too freely, and, ah, you

had, they burnt a lot of coal. Always take coal over the railroad. We'd fill up the tank at, at Maysville, and we may, ah, take another tank before we got to Russell. /MJG: Oh, my goodness./ I'm telling you that was a hard job, hard job. I've had water to seep out of my shoes in, ah, freezing weather. /MJG: From perspiration./ Yeah. /MJG: Goodness./ Now, that didn't happen all the time, but it has happened, and, ah.

MJG: Was the locomotive engine heated, I mean, other than the heat from the engine itself? Did you have separate heat?

JCN: Oh, there wasn't, no, there wasn't at that time. Heat was just, ah /MJG: Uh huh./, exercise heat. /MJG: Yes, yes./ (laughter) All, all their cabs was completely open. /MJG: Uh huh./ Ah, they had windows on each side and had a front window. You see, all of this back area was open because that's, that's your gear workshop back there. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, it was out in the open all the time and, ah, it got awful cold in the cab. And, then today, they trying to keep the summertime heat in the cab in the wintertime. In the summertime on a day that was ninety, those engines at that time would get so hot inside you couldn't touch anything with your hands and hold it. That's the reason everybody, the engineer had to wear gloves all the time.

MJG: What kind of gloves did you wear?

JCN: Well, I always, ah, I always wore, ah, gauntlet gloves was made out of deerskin. /MJG: Uh huh./ They was the most popular at that time. They, they cost, I believe, a dollar and 25 or 50 cents. Something like that there.

MJG: That's nearly a day's wage if you're working in the yard and almost half a day's wage if you're working on the road for a pair of gloves.

JCN: Yeah. That's right.

MJG: That's a substantial amount of money.

JCN: Yeah. And, you, and there wasn't any rule at that day and time that you could, ah, could make so much during the month. If the business would happen to break your way, you would make, ah, pretty good month's wages. If they didn't, you

just made vaguely eight or ten days. /MJG: Uh huh./ That wasn't very much so, ah, that was, ah, pretty rough goin' back at that time.

MJG: Well, on these trips when you would be gone over night where did you usually stay?

JCN: Stayed at the YMCA /MJG: Uh huh./ at Russell, Kentucky.

MJG: Is that still there? Is the YMCA still there?

JCN: Not the one that was there when I went to work.

MJG: Uh huh. Could you describe it for us? What was it like?

JCN: Well, the YMCA there was, ah, if I remember correctly, it had about, ah, 18 or 20 bedrooms. They were small. They was just enough to get in and hang your garmets up on a nail and a small bed in there.

MJG: Were they individual rooms there?

JCN: Yeah, yeah, and, ah, the, ah, just had a dining counter at that time. I don't believe more than ten could get around that dining counter /MJG: Uh huh./ when I started to work.

MJG: What did they charge, do you recall, for lodging and meals?

JCN: Oh, ah, a bed cost twenty cents.

MJG: Uh huh. Well, then that would be very reasonable for the time.

JCN: Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, we didn't have any problems with the YMCA.

MJG: Uh huh. When you were on the roads, what kind of meals did you, did you bring? Ah, nowadays, ah, it seems working people can't get along without a big thermos of coffee or sandwiches. What kinds of things did you bring on the road with you?

JCN: We, ah, we carried enough lunch, ah, ah, all at once if you wanted to, ah, to do a round trip. And, ah, oh, I had one fireman after I got married. He was a pretty good cook, and, ah, we had fixed up an arrangement, ah, to where we could take take what they call, ah, pie plate use on section and put it

in the firebox maybe 20 minutes before we knew we was going to head into side track to have time enough to cook our meat. And, ah, we had, I remember one time we had, ah, preacher with us, riding, and we started to head into side track, and that boy finally reached in there a little hook and pulled that red hot piece of steel out. Of course, the back of the locomotive is steel, didn't hurt, and, ah, he had coffee made and eggs fried, fried potatoes time we got stopped over on the side track (laughter).

MJG: Better service than a dining car.

JCN: That's right. I'm telling you, you had an appetite back there in those days now. You could even go along of a morning, early morning, the farmers up early and cooking. You could get an aroma off, out of the kitchen as you went by, you know. /MJG: Uh huh./ You didn't have any trouble working up an appetite.

MJG: Did you get to know people along the way? I mean, where you get to know them by waving acquaintance?

JCN: Oh, yeah. They'd, everybody was always waving at the railroad man as they'd go by.

MJG: How long did you stay on the fireman's job?

JCN: I fired about three years and five months.

MJG: So that's down about to 1909, 1910?

JCN: I was promoted January 10, 1910.

MJG: What position did you hold then?

JCN: I'd, ah, worked up on the engineer's extra list.

MJG: Now, when you're promoted to, ah, engineer's extra, promoted on this list presumably you do a different kind of job? Now, would you have special training for engineering or is this something /JCN: No./ you just picked up /JCN: No./ from experience?

JCN: Well, you had, ah, you had to go through a test, written test

and an oral test before you could be allowed to run a locomotive.

MJG: What kind of test was it?

JCN: Well, it was, you had one on machinery. They asked a lot of questions, ah, ah, about a locomotive. What would you do if you would break a side drive or a main road or?

MJG: What would you do?

JCN: (Laughs) You would fix it if you could.

MJG: How would you go about fixing it?

JCN: Well, they've always got nuts on them and to hold them together and, ah, bolts and so forth.

MJG: Would you carry that kind of equipment with you?

JCN: No, you had to take that part off /MJG: Uh huh./, the part that was broken. You'd have to take it off and maybe run that engine in on just one side. /MJG: Uh huh./ The big proposition then if you happened to stop her on center, she wouldn't move. /MJG: Uh huh./ If the piston was at on the good side with the (inaudible) end of the cylinder, she didn't move. You had to stop it so that the piston would be away from the front or the back end so you could get some steam against it so it would start moving.

MJG: Now, how could you gage this? How would you gage something like that? Was it a feel or could you see it or?

JCN: You, ah, it was just, ah. (Break) We had different, ah, methods of mostly what engine men would, could think of. Sometimes we would, ah, reverse the engine. Kind of let her, ah, back pressure stop it and lot of times that would stop her and then she wouldn't stop on center. Of course, you could look out here and see the name table out the window, you see, look right out the window and see where that was. Ah, we used, ah, what is known as right lead locomotives at that time. That meant that the locomotive on the right side of the engine was taking steam when the cylinders on the other side couldn't get steam. /MJG: Uh huh./ Now, left lead would have been just the opposite, and, ah, but this locomotive on at the main cam is on

ah, one of the back centers that meant that the piston was up front or back end of the cylinders. /MJG: I see. I see./ And, ah, that way the exhaust, the, ah, emission ports for that side is closed. /MJG: Uh huh./ So that's the reason, ah, the engin--they had problems when you were trying to operate a locomotive on one side, but, ah.

MJG: What is, do you remember any other kinds of questions that they'd ask you?

JCN: Oh, case of, you want to close them (windows)?

MJG: Yes. That's a big enough lawn mower all right.

JCN: I thought maybe they would get in the way. I didn't know. There were numerous questions. Ah, some were in regard to hot burns /MJG: Uh huh./ and things like that. And, you had, ah, pass an examination on air brakes. And, ah, the air brake usually throwed most firemen.

MJG: Uh huh. Why is that?

JCN: Well, they're, you've got more technical /MJG: Uh huh./, and, ah, ah, there's so many pipes and so forth, and all of them got air in them. Some of them, some of them don't have any air in them. And, you've got a brake valve there that's got, ah, five positions on it. But, the full rate line might say it's an emergency. And, ah, whenever the handle in either one of those positions, why, you were supposed to know what was going wrong. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, that's the brake valve right there. That's an automatic brake valve. This, ah, this brake valve right here is to stop and start the locomotive. /MJG: Uh huh./ I mean, stop the locomotive independent from this automatic brake valve. /MJG: I see./ And, it was, they was, I remember likely about 90 questions, you know.

MJG: Uh huh. Yeah, you said the firemen had trouble with the air brake section. Did you have any trouble with it?

JCN: Ah, no. Seems as though that, ah, I kind of liked air brakes. /MJG: Uh huh./ Liked to study it and one thing or other. And, the brake foreman that promoted me, well, in the first place, ah, they were all up for promotion in the superintendent's

office, E. P. Goodwin, and, ah, every brakeman on there was, ah, going to pass through the book of rules, and we was all up in book of rules. I done finished up on the, ah, air and machinery side. And, ah, before we got, we got started, session got started, and, ah, about 30 minutes after it got started, the roundhouse foreman come over there and stuck his head in the office, and, ah, Mr. Goodwin recognized him and said, ah, "What can I do for you, Dan?" His name was Dan Dee. I think he was from, from New Orleans. Come up there and got a job as roundhouse foreman. Long, lanky, redheaded. Said, "Mr. Goodwin, I've got to have four engineers." Business was gettin' good. And, ah, he said, "Dan," said, do you think you can pick out four more?" Said, "Yes, sir." So that broke up the, the, ah, examination at that time. So, ah, we went out the roundhouse, and, ah, he told us, said, "Now, you fellows stick around." Says, "We're going to use you tonight." About six inches of snow on the ground. And, ah, long about seven o'clock they called me. And, ah, I hustled up from home up to the roundhouse, and I was going to be the engineer on the second engine. It was a double header. So we got started out, and we was all night and part of the next day getting to Russell. And, we was in side track at South Portsmouth quite a while, passenger trains. And, while we was in there, I read the book of rules through for the first time (laughter). That's what I was going to have the examination on.

MJG: Oh, goodness. You must be fortunate.

JCN: Well, I had done a lot of roadwork, and you get that by experience, you know. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, after we had had four or five hours sleep to Russell, the coal boy called us. Fellow by the name of Bill Teed and myself to report at the superintendent's private car, a little track to the roundhouse report for examination on the book of rules. That was just two of us now. Usually if you have, ah, ah, quite a number of candidates in there, why, ah, you don't have to answer so many questions. /MJG: Uh huh./ In this case, I answered almost the whole book of rules. /MJG: Oh, goodness./ This fellow that, ah. /MJG: This is on five hours sleep./ Yeah. /MJG: After working a full day./ Yeah, well, we work /MJG: All night./, we worked about, ah, 12, 14 hours. /MJG: Oh, my./ Well, anyway, this fellow going up with me he was, he was older than I was in seniority, and, ah, he was always somewhat of a hard-headed fellow, you know. The train

master asked him a question, and I noticed he didn't know exactly how to answer it, and I'd, I'd either shake my head or nod my head to him to get him to answer it right. He would just do the opposite, and he fell down; he, he failed. /MJG: Uh huh./ Course he, he only played along, but, ah, that changed the seniority. He followed, he went in behind me /MJG: Uh huh./ on that day so they run me back the next, ah, early morning and, ah, that snow was still on. They, they run me light by myself, that is, ah, I was just a full-fledged engineer /MJG: Uh huh./ taking off then. And, ah, we went down to Ashland yard and picked up a caboose. Incidentally, I just happened to think of that old conductor's name. His name was Gainer, John Gainer. And, then, ah, we picked this caboose up and took off down to Cincinnati and went into Vanceburg, Kentucky, to, ah, pick up a train and side track being set off there for some reason or other. Maybe engine break down or something. And, ah, we got ready to go. It was awful cold, and it was about an hour before a passenger train was due there so we tried to get the train out. We got about half way out. We'd just move along three, four mile an hour, and we had to back the train back in and wait for this passenger train to go. Anyway, that kind of loosened up the binds. /MJG: Uh huh./ You see, those binds on cars gets cold, and they won't hardly move at all in that kind of weather. /MJG: Uh huh./ So, ah, after the train got by, Mr. Gainer climbed up on the engine and said, "Now, Joe," he said, "I've been around here a long time on these locomotives, and, now," he said, "you just take hold of this job and take off from here just like you have 20 years experience." I said, "Thank you." Well, we made it right into Covington, and the next day I was down to road foreman's office. His name was Bill Lewis. Fine old fellow. I walked in his office, and he said, "Well, how did you make out?" I said, "I don't know." He said, ah, "Did you come back by yourself?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, then you made it." (laughter) He said, "I want to ask you a question." He reached down to give me a switch key. That was your medal at that time. That took care of all the switches along the railroad. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, said, "I want to ask you something." I said, "All right." He said, "How old are you?" I said, "Twenty one." (laughs) He said, "I just thought that." Ah, I told them I was, when I made an application, I told them I was 22 (laughter). If you didn't, you had to get your parents to sign a release, see. /MJG: Oh./ My mother didn't want to do it. She didnt

want me to go to railroad. /MJG: Uh huh./ So, ah, it all turned out for good. /MJG: Uh huh./ I guess I was about one of the youngest men ever promoted on the /MJG: Uh huh./ C & O. I don't know but one or two that was promoted when they was that age, but, ah.

MJG: Did you live in Huntington at that time?

JCN: Oh, no, I lived in Covington at that time. /MJG: Uh huh./ I lived in Covington. I stayed there till 1935.

MJG: Uh huh. I see. What was Covington like? What was it like as a town?

JCN: About, ah, 70,000 population.

MJG: Quite a large town then. /JCN: Yeah./ What kinds of things did you do for entertainment as a young man of 21 working on the railroad? Ah, when you had spare time, what did you do with it?

JCN: Well, I never did have a telephone until 1911. The call boys would come call, you know. I got married in 1911, February 22nd. And, ah, my wife and I took a honeymoon to California and back.

MJG: Did you go by train?

JCN: Yeah. I had an uncle living out there. Then we got telephone. And, ah, we came back, and we set up housekeeping that was the first telephone I ever had. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, incidentally, the first inside plumbing we had here I was used to it.

MJG: Did you find they really made difference in your life or more of an nuisance in your life?

JCN: Well, I was fairly used to them, but, ah, I never lived in a home where I had any kind of convenience. But, ah, entertainment, ah, we had a point down there we called by the name of Lagoon at, ah, that was down in Ludlow, Kentucky. Just get on a car and go down there. Five cents. Then we had a little of everything. Dancing, boating, games of all kinds. Like you find at any other port. Yeah, I used to go down there; maybe another fellow and I, some friend go down there. Dance around until midnight, come back home.

MJG: Now, by car, you mean a street car?

JCN: Yeah, that was all by street car.

MJG: I see.

JCN: I remember when Covington had horse cars. /MJG: Oh, my./ When we first moved to Covington, Covington had horse cars. My uncle drove, ah, the one that was in California that I went to see, he drove a horse car and carriage. /MJG: Uh huh./ They'd go across extension bridge. They had what they called a snatch team there. A couple of mules and, ah, they'd pull them up to the center of the suspension bridge, cut off, no, they'd go ahead over and pick one up coming back. /MJG: Uh huh./ But, ah, all my days spent down there cars, street cars. Open front end; no vestibules. /MJG: Uh huh./ Cousin of mine, motorman, that's the way he started it. If it rained, you took it. If it snowed, you took it.

MJG: In the house you that had, you said you had, you had indoor plumbing for the first time and telephone for the first time. What kind of heat did you have? What kind of heat did most of the houses have? Ah, were they coal, coal or wood-burning heat?

JCN: Oh, oh, yeah, they was all coal. I never, I never used gas till I moved to Huntingon. /MJG: Uh huh./ We burned coal all of the time in Covington. Gas was so blooming high in Covington that you couldn't afford it. Coal was, ah, much cheaper than gas was. Now, I'll tell you, I'll say this for Huntington. I've never seen a truckload of coal being delivered to a family /MJG: Uh huh./ dwelling house.

MJG: Nor have I. Well, let's come back to, to the railroad, ah, after you married, how did this affect your life as an engineer? Ah, did you continue, were the hours still six or seven-day week? Ah, were the hours more regular then?

JCN: No, no, I, no, ah, see, I'd only been promoted about a year when I got married, and, ah, I worked on the extra board as an engineer till about, ah, 1917.

MJG: Uh huh. Can you recall at all what that paid working on the extra board as an engineer? Was that an increase over what

you earned as a fireman or was, was it a dry promotion?

JCN: An engin--ah, running an engine, ah, we seems to me that we got, I can't, don't remember. I will say this. You had to work an awful lot in a month to get, make a $100. /MJG: Uh huh./ I think, ah, I think a road trip paid around that time about eight, somewhere in the neighborhood of $8 a day.

MJG: Well, was there a difference between a road trip for someone like yourself hauling freight and someone hauling passengers or was just being an engineer being an engineer? The same sort of rate for both.

JCN: No. You, you made, ah, see, our, you go on mileage mostly. /MJG: Uh huh./ On roads, longer the division, the more money you make. And, my passenger division was from Cincinnati to Huntington. /MJG: Uh huh./ That was 160 miles. So, we made a little more money on passenger. Course passenger paid less per mile /MJG: But, the roads were longer./ than the freight did /MJG: I see./, but the longer mileage made a little bit more money. /MJG: I see./ And, ah, I was running passenger trains when I was 28 years old. It was the only train they had around here by the time I was 28 years old.

MJG: Well, you said you worked that job until 1917. What happened then?

JCN: That was, ah, that was extra. /MJG: Extra./ Yeah. Well, when 19 I think it was 17 or early 18 the year that this C & O Bridge down here at Portsmouth was completed and the railroad from there on till Columbus over to Waverly we, ah, connected with the N & W at Waverly Railroad, and we was N & W on into Columbus, trackage rights. And, ah, when that opened up, that gave me a regular job. /MJG: I see./ Cause the men that was older than I was they, they fell into regular jobs on what they call this northern division. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, them that was just taken off the Cincinnati division, 19 miles west of Russell belonged to the Cincinnati division then, see. So, that gave me a regular job, and, ah, course you never know how long you'll hold a regular job if somebody older than you would be removed off the job they had. They could take your job if you happen to be youngest man. You have to take the youngest man's job off of him.

MJG: Now, at this time, by this time, the railroad was unionized,

the C & O.

JCN: The C & O has always been unionized when I went to work for them.

MJG: I see. What was the ...

JCN: The L & N wasn't.

MJG: Uh huh. What was the union, do you recall, what was the name of the union?

JCN: Well, ah, was, ah, Locomotive Firemen after the Fireman's Lodge, and, ah, BLE, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers for the engineers. It done a lot of good for men back in those days. Course the way it is now it wouldn't help if you made a million dollars.

MJG: Do you recall what dues were roughly, ah, what for the BLA and the Locomotive Firemen, what dues you paid as union members.

JCN: No, no, I don't remember. It wasn't very much.

MJG: Uh huh. They were small.

JCN: Yeah. Yeah. They wasn't very much.

MJG: How successful were they at negotiating contracts for you all?

JCN: I tell you, ah, I was never in a strike as long as I was an engineer. Never had a strike.

MJG: That's successful negotiations.

JCN: They always, they go to Richmond and meet over there with the top officials and iron their troubles out. They didn't have very much trouble.

MJG: Did they ever consult the engineers or the firemen to find out exactly what it was they were interested in or was the decision making done by the union officials themselves, the shop stewards and so on?

JCN: Ah.

MJG: How much of a say so did you as an engineer, fireman actually have in what they were asking for?

JCN: Well, we all had general chairman and, ah, had a lodge. And, they'd take the troubles down there and fight them out in the lodge and, ah, come up with something to present to the high officials. /MJG: Uh huh./ We got along real well. We, we never had any trouble. /MJG: Uh huh./ We had a good, ah, company to work for and work with. I'm real proud of it.

MJG: Oh, that's wonderful. How long were you an engineer? You said that the time you were an engineer you were never on strike. How long did that last?

JCN: I ran locomotive up until July 20, 1941. /MJG: Uh huh./ About seven and a half years before that I was running, ah, the "Sportsman" between here and Columbus. /MJG: The "Sportsman?"/ Between here and Columbus every night; up one night and back the next.

MJG: Uh huh. Now, ah, that means you were driving. You were in charge of passenger trains during the Depression.

JCN: I was, I was engineer on the passenger tain at that time. /MJG: Uh huh./ Then, ah, from 1935 to 41.

MJG: Uh huh. What was the railroad work like in the Depression? How hard hit was the C & O by the Depression?

JCN: Well, the, ah, men voluntarily, firemen and engineers voluntarily, agreed to work just so many days. /MJG: Uh huh./ The men on the passenger run were agreed to move one round trip every two weeks. And, ah, the men on road service they would, ah, they agreed to work so many days, lay off and let the extra men /MJG: Uh huh./ have a job. /MJG: Uh huh./ It wasn't, it wasn't too tough. It worked out real, pretty good. Incidentally, way back there in Teddy Roosevelt's reign (laughter), I got paid off in scrip. /MJG: In scrip?/ That was good in any bank.

MJG: Now, this is in Teddy Roosevelt or Franklin Roosevelt?

JCN: No.

MJG: This is Teddy Roosevelt.

JCN: No, no, Teddy.

MJG: Oh, my. No, this is the time when the old man wanted to cut ten percent.

JCN: No, no, no, ah, that was the time when Teddy wielded that big club you always read about. Ah, seems as though that, ah, Teddy was having troubles with big moneyed people, and they threatened to shut the money off on him. /MJG: Uh huh./ He said, "All right, shut it off. I'll make some." That's what he did. He made scrip, and the C & O paid off in scrip. /MJG: Uh huh./ Now, they didn't have any trouble. Anybody would take it. /MJG: Uh huh./ I don't remember how long it lasted, but I got paid in scrip. They beat him down so that they /MJG: Uh huh./ come around.

MJG: Let's come forward a little bit to Franklin Roosevelt and the Depression days. You were running passenger trains from 1935, the "Sportsman" to Columbus. From 1935 on was there a decrease in the number of passengers travelling or was there an increase? Did most people travel by train or?

JCN: Oh, we had, ah, back in those early days we had a lot of travel on passenger trains. /MJG: Uh huh./ For instance, ah, going back a little farther than that, ah, I'd been on local passenger trains, ah, many times between Cincinnati and Huntington here. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, we'd go down to South Portsmouth was the usual place that we loaded on a lot of people, farmers, and people that would come up there on northern trains and down the road, and, ah, go over to Portsmouth, Ohio.

SIDE TWO

MJG: In Portsmouth.

JCN: Ah, when we'd leave, ah, Portsmouth, we have the people standing room only, three or four coaches, and the conductor as soon as we would get a mile or two out of town, he'd pull me to stop. I knew what he was pulling me for, see, ah, so we'd stop. Directly, ah, maybe ten minutes, he'd pull the whistle again to go ahead. And, that's happened many a time. We had to stop to get all of the tickets. /MJG: Oh./ Ah, you didn't

pay as you entered like. /MJG: Uh huh./ The conductor, now, he had to go through and find all of these people.

MJG: Oh, did you have any people, you know, you always see in the films of the 30's and read books about people jumping on the trains and trying to hitch free rides and so on.

JCN: No, course, the freight trains, yeah, they, hobos. But, they just, ah, the deal we had in that was, ah, when Hoover was president and, ah, veterans made a march on Washington /MJG: Washington./, they may be 15 or 20 or 30 riding a freight train. When I was going Russell down here, there would be so many. They didn't, they didn't take them off. They usually they would arrest people, you know, the hobo, but they put on empty box cars down there and let the people get in it. Just stay right in that box car, keep goin'.

MJG: Do you recall, ah, any particular experiences during the Depression that are particularly vivid in your mind that stand out or anything that you remember back in your own life in that period?

JCN: No, I didn't have, I didn't have any problems. I've always had a job during the Depression. I had enough, ah, seniority to, I had, ah, make enough to live off of /MJG: Uh huh./ and bought, built, ah, built me a home in 1919 /MJG: Uh huh./ and, ah.

MJG: And, where, that was in Covington?

JCN: Yeah, that was in a real nice part of Covington /MJG: Uh huh./ right around the Holmes High School and, ah.

MJG: Were mortgages hard to come by then or did you build this with cash?

JCN: I paid part of it, ah, down. The contractor was a friend of mine, said, "Where did you get all of this money?" (laughter) But, ah, my wife was a real economical young woman, and she didn't, ah, expect a whole lot and didn't, ah, spend a lot of money like some people might. We always, ah, got along. I lived in this place for about, ah, in 19, ah, my youngest son was born in this home. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, I sold that when he was about a year old, and some guy wanted it worse than I did; and I let him have it.

MJG: Do you recall what the selling price of it was?

JCN: Yeah. I got $10,000 for it. It cost me $6,500, I believe, to build it.

MJG: Uh huh. That's a handsome profit.

JCN: He was an Englishman, and it was a nice bungalow they called them at that time. Nice five rooms, basement, garage under the basement. Very nice street. And, ah, I moved out of there on the first day of March, 1923. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, in another six-room brick down closer to my work. No, we never had, ah, we never had any money problems other than the price increase. We didn't make a whole lot either, but, ah ...

MJG: Uh huh. Did you keep what you had in the banks? Did any of the banks in Covington go under where you had money?

JCN: I never had very much in bank in Covington. Ah, let's see, ah, First National Bank in Covington, and I think there was a German National Bank in Covington, and I believe there was a Citizen's National Bank in Covington.

MJG: Now, they all went under?

JCN: No, when Roosevelt closed them, ah, there was only one that failed to open and everybody thought it was the strongest bank. It was the First National. /MJG: Uh huh./ I think. /MJG: Uh huh./ It was, ah, everybody thought it was the strongest bank of all of them. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, that's where I had it (laughter) in there, checking. /MJG: Uh huh./ But, they paid off. /MJG: They did?/ Yeah.

MJG: Well, you were very fortunate.

JCN: There was a one down here at Russell that failed when, ah, Ironton, course naturally didn't come back. I know a lot of other boys that lost three or four thousand dollars /MJG: Uh huh./, and that's a lot of money back there. /MJG: Yes, it was./ But, ah, my own experience, I didn't have any problem.

MJG: Uh huh. What was the run, ah, to, from Huntington to Columbus like? What, ah, I know, ah, since your retirement you've taken to painting some of the scenes.

JCN: It was nights both ways (laughs).

MJG: Nights both ways. /JCN: Yeah./ Ah, what does an engineer on a trip like that think about? Ah, the ground's pretty flat and.

JCN: Oh, no, they's both ways up and down hill. Mostly till we got up above, ah, Chillicothe up, ah, it'd straighten out a little bit after a while. Well, you stay awake, and you watch for these green lights to pop up.

MJG: Uh huh. Is it a lonesome kind of work? Ah, do you have your.

JCN: No, no, it's not lonesome. Ah, I made many a trip between here and Columbus that it was so foggy that I couldn't see anything all nighttime. Except maybe you would get a glimpse of that green light as you went by. That's all you had to do was sit there and watch that green light. /MJG: Uh huh./ Of course, you had to watch the water in the boiler to keep them from exploding and all that kind of stuff, you know, but, ah, they'd call the firemen supposed to call the signals. The worst part of going up there was a lot of trip I made that I didn't see nothing /MJG: Uh huh./, depend on the firemen. The wind, when the wind was blowing, seemed like it would blow that exhaust smoke down on the engineer's side /MJG: Ahh./, blowing north, coming out of west wind, you see. /MJG: Uh huh./ You was just in a fog there all the way from the time you got across this, ah, Ohio River Bridge down here at Portsmouth till you got to Columbus you didn't see nothing. /MJG: Uh huh./ Ah, in that case, I had developed a little technique up there about, ah, maybe two miles this side of, ah, Columbus yard to take care of a situation like that. There was a culvert up there covered with big long bridge, and I could always hear the sound from the middle of that culvert, and I'd look at my watch. And, one minute after that I put brakes on. /MJG: Hmm./ Couldn't see nothing, couldn't see anything at all. /MJG: Uh huh./ Just smoke. And by the time, time I got down to, ah, 20 mile an hour or 30 mile an hour that smoke would raise up off my side of the engine there, and, ah, I could see. /MJG: Uh huh./ But, ah, lots of times up there you get in a dense fog; many a many trip. You couldn't see, hardly see the front end of the locomotive /MJG: Hmm./, and the next time just the same. And, ah, when I developed that, ah, time rating there the /MJG: Uh huh./ if the signal at the yard

was red, I had to stop before I got to it and, ah.

MJG: At what speeds would you be travelling from, on this Huntington to Columbus?

JCN: Sixty mile per hour was the speed limit over there. /MJG: Uh huh./ Kind of a new road bed, but it was a good road bed.

MJG: Uh huh. You said you went up at night and came back at night. This meant you spent, you spent the evening in Columbus.

JCN: I stayed in a hotel up there in Columbus. /MJG: Uh huh./ We left here about the same time we did Columbus, 11 o'clock at night.

MJG: Now, around this time you also moved to Huntington, ah /JCN: I come to Huntington when I took that job./, when you took that job. Where did you live in Huntington when you moved here first?

JCN: Ah, I stayed down here at the old Huntington Hotel for about a year. I was, ah, I lost my first wife in 1931, July 20th. And, ah, tried to make it with a housekeeper. A minister's wife; didn't do real well. And, she stayed with me, and my wife died of cancer incidentally. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, she had a son. He didn't like to work, and I was keeping him, too (laughter). And, ah, it just got so tough that I broke up housekeeping and /MJG: Uh huh./ my oldest boy and I, we shared a room together for three months until he got started into University of Kentucky, Lexington. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, but, ah, this room I had, the man that owned that was a good friend of mine. We knocked around together a lot of times in Covington and used to run around with his sister. She was a fine looking old gal. And, ah, I believe in 1933, around Christmastime, he was on this run to Columbus, and he turned over mile post, between mile post 52 and 53 and killed him. And, firemen managed to come out of there alive. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, that gave me seniority next to come up here and take that job myself. /MJG: I see./ And, ah, that is the reason I came to Huntington was to, ah /MJG: Uh huh./, ah, work at Covington that time as, ah, got down in seniority to the point where that I had to keep changing jobs around in order to keep working. /MJG: Uh huh./ Some boy said, "Now, if you go up there and take that, I'm going to come up and move you." I said, "Well, you can't take but one job at a time, brother,

work on one. And, he said, "Well, I'll take it." (laughter) I came up there and held out on her, and I stayed on her; nobody ever bothered me. /MJG: Uh huh./ Several men older than me that could have taken it, but /MJG: Uh huh./ one fellow down here at Russell, he, he never had been on passenger run. He'd worked on the yard's job all the time. He decided he was going to take it (laughs). He come up to Columbus, I guess on a freight train or something, rode the engine back with me, and he got, he got scared out. He never did take it.

MJG: Hmm. What would that be? What would, ah, what was different about it that would scare him off?

JCN: You've got to be able to think fast for one thing. And, ah, there's foggy nights. You don't, ah, if you had, ah, rails under your automobile and take, you run off the track, you'd get along in a fog maybe all right. That's the only ways we got along was to have the track under us. /MJG: Uh huh./ But, we had a lot of road crossings. /MJG: Uh huh./ We had a lot of signals every two or three miles. We had to see them. If you got by a signal, you didn't have any job. /MJG: Hmm./ That was it. This stop sign down here at, ah, toward the end of my lot don't mean a thing to a lot of people, but it does to me. /MJG: Yes./ I stop, then look where I'm going. And, I've seen a lot of good engine men walk the streets because they didn't stop soon enough, and some of them just took a chance on rolling by, you know, like they drove around the corner here about they'd get caught. So, they don't get back.

MJG: Well, how did they find out?

JCN: Company pulled them out. It would be costly to them. It would be maybe a year's wages. Men are pretty well disciplined on the railroad in this kind of thing. /MJG: Uh huh./ Either you do or you don't; one of the two.

MJG: Well, with this kind of job where you were going back and forth to Columbus all the time I guess you didn't have much of a chance to find out what Huntington was like as, as far as the town was concerned.

JCN: Well, I'd get in here around 2:30 in the morning. /MJG: Uh huh./ There was a plane that, ah, left Cincinnati that used to wake me up about noon coming over my house where I lived down on

Madison Avenue wake me up everyday; I'd get up. /MJG: Uh huh./ It used to ride across the river. They had a port across the river in those days before we had an airport over here. /MJG: Uh huh./ Liked to roll me out of bed it was down so low (laughs). I saw some houses down Huntington then.

MJG: What kinds of things would it include? Now, this is into the thirties, this is, but it's not Depression time necessarily for you; however, well, you have a job and you have regular income. It was for a lot of people. What kind of things did people do in the Depression years?

JCN: Well, I was gone so much, you see, and, ah /MJG: Uh huh./, my wife, she stayed home and raised the kids /MJG: Uh huh./, two boys. Her father and mother lived out back of Cincinnati, Madisonville, and we'd go out there about every weekend maybe to see them. They had a lot of youngsters out there, nephews.

MJG: Did you have a car by then or did you travel up to Cincinnati on the train?

JCN: That's before we moved to Madisonville. They lived, ah, in east end, East Walnut Hills, and, ah, we went on streetcar at that time.

MJG: I see. Was much of the of your social life, ah, centered around the church or? /JCN: Yeah./ Well, what church would that be?

JCN: Ah, Emmanual Baptist Church in Covington, and I'm still part of the Fifth Avenue, Huntington.

MJG: Uh huh. Do you remember who was the pastor at Fifth Avenue when you first came to Huntington or when you first joined the church?

JCN: You mean up here? /MJG: Yeah./ Yeah. Norman Cox.

MJG: Norman Cox. That's in, in the 1930's, 1935.

JCN: Nineteen thirty five. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, I joined this church down here in 1935. I didn't waste any time after got up here. I was staying down here at the Huntington Hotel. Every chance I'd get I'd go to church on Sunday. /MJG: Uh huh./

He used to call me the boy engineer (laughter). He says, "I don't, I can't understand how a young fellow like you can be on a passenger run." He was a fine gentleman.

MJG: Uh huh. Now, how long did you stay actually as an engineer? You said you had a run, a "Sportsman" run in 1941.

JCN: Ah, air brake instructor on the C & O, he quit. He didn't retire; he just quit. And, ah, the general air brake instructor, he was a hired engineer on Cincinnati division, and he came from, ah, Charlottesville. He got promoted over there, but he couldn't get a job. He had to fire all the time, so, ah, we were hiring some engineers at Covington. We'd run out of men to promote, you see, and, ah, he and several of them, he came over there and rolled out, ah, maybe a year or two. In the meantime before he come over there, he had a job on this air car. He was, ah, ah, attendant, you might say. He was a promoted man. He looked after the records, and, ah, see who came and who didn't, and, ah, all those kinds of things, and kept the car clean. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, ah, instructor was a boss of the car. And, that fellow, I can't think of his name 'cause when I was a kid before I went to kindergarten in Covington, this old fellow lived about five, four or five doors from where I lived. /MJG: Uh huh./ I was about five years old at the time, and he was engineer on the C & O, and he got to be, ah, air brake instructor. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, he retired, he quit and went to Westinghouse Railway Company, and he went on through up in New York State I believe it was. Anyway, he's dead. He was way over the retirement age. His name was Bill Sleet. /MJG: Sleet?/ Sleet, and, ah, he was with Westinghouse, ah, many years and when he, he quit to go to Westinghouse, this fellow from the Cincinnati division, Bob Anderson, he, they called him from Richmond and called him over there to take his place. Now, he held that job all the time, and later on, and he, he used to ride with me when I'd go on passenger runs. We'd ride apiece, and we'd chat, you know. And, ah, in 1941 was in Columbus coming east one night, and I run into him in the station. He said, "Come over here; I want to talk to you." All right, so, I went over there. He said, ah, "How would you like to consider being air brake instructor on the C & O?" I said, "You asked me too quick (laughter)." I said, ah, "Well, ah, I'm not qualified." He said, "Don't worry about that. We'll get you qualified." Well, ah, a few days after that, ah,

a few days after that I heard from the boss at Russell, called me on the phone. He said, "You catch No. 4 tonight, and report to Bob Anderson's office in Richmond tomorrow morning." I held the phone a little while. Maybe that was No. 2; no, No. 4. So, I went over there, and, and went in the office. Said, "Well, you've got the job." So, I thanked him, and, ah, so he came in, you know, an hour later, and I, it was Mr. C. B. Hitch. I knew him very well when he was a master mechanic at Covington, and, ah, he said, "Joe," he said, "there's only one little advice I'm going to give you," he said, "get along with people." I said, "Well, I haven't had much trouble with that all my life. I think I can make it." So, that's the way I started in on the air brake job. /MJG: Uh huh./ I promoted men to engineers. I've checked shop tracks, and I've checked around the stations when there was a passenger train to see if it was making tests properly. I was, I was practically under government supervision all the air brakes. The government takes care of all those kinds of things, and you have to comply with them.

MJG: Uh huh. Now, you developed a new method for air brake testing, didn't you for long trains?

JCN: Yeah, I didn't, well, I have, I guess that, ah, I was the first man on the Cincinnati division to make a running release with a 140-car coal train. That means I put the brakes on and released them, the air brake and the train, too. /MJG: Hmm./ And, ah.

MJG: Now, when was that?

JCN: Well, that was during my time I was on the Cincinnati division after being there for after, ah, oh around 1920's, along in there. Incidentally, this, ah, this air brake instructor that we had that quit and I succeeded, you know, I was, you know, they run an air car route all over the division, the railroad, ah, every year and everybody has to attend it. If you don't attend it, they make you call it the next place it goes, and you have to attend at least twice, two meetings. And, he explained air brakes, see, all that time. And, ah, I was in the car at Covington one time. He and I always get along real well and chatted. He was talking about how it was not the time to release the brakes or after you put them on a long train. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, I said, ah, we was alone at the time, I said, "You know, you're going to be in the Richmond

Office some morning, and you're going to see where some darn fool engineer on the Cincinnati division tried to make a running release and tied up the railroad (laughter)." He said, ah, "What are you talking about?" I said, "I believe that I can put the brakes on a 140-car coal train and take them off without any trouble." He said, "No," he said, "Joe, I don't believe you can do it. You just quit. You've done enough today. You, you can't do that. Better not try it." So, sometime after that, not many months, I was going down Cincinnati division with 140 loads of coal. Conditions set itself up on signals to give you a chance to try it, see, there was a coal train at Concord that took coal to market. And, ah, I come up on an approach signal which was yellow, and I put the brakes on, not very, I made, ah, probably five pound or six pound reduction. Put the brakes on good, pretty good, and, ah, when I got around to where I could see the next signal, it went yellow. /MJG: Uh huh./ So, I, I could go by that signal now. But, that told me we had just pulled away from the coaling station and cleared that block at the coaling station. So, I, ah, a chap by the name of Ted DiAlbi, and he retired as a road foreman up here at Huntington four, five years ago, he was firing for me. And, I had been talking to him about trying it, and he said, ah, "Joe, bet you can't do that." I said, so, I made another little application so I to see if I could get enough. And, I said, "Well, there's no better time than right now to find out." And, ah, and I, when you put this brake valve in full release right here /MJG: Yes./, see, you release the brakes you can hear a little, ah, hissing sound (illustrates). And, when he heard that brake valve hissing, he just grabbed the armrest like this (laughter) because he was afraid that engine was going to throw him through the front window, I guess, and, ah, everything went along all right. Conductor never even knew the brakes had ever been put on at all, and I went through that operation twice after that that night. Ah, next time I put them on and took them off was going through Maysville, and I put them on and kicked them off to slow down going in the yard at Stevens. /MJG: Uh huh./ Then, I quit. I was at the end of the line, see, freight train. /MJG: Uh huh./ And, we put our train away and backed up to the roundhouse, the firemen got off, took off, time I got bag and coat and something I slid down the grab iron onto the ground and looked around; and there was this air brake instructor coming out of the roundhouse door. He come over, shook hands, said, "Well, glad to see ya. How

you getting along?" I said, "Fine." I said, "Do you remember what I told you I was going to do coming home one night, and you said I couldn't do it?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "There's 140 cars out there. I had them on and off three times last night (laughter)." I'm telling you could have knocked his eyes off with a stick. I developed that thing, ah, on through that. I even wrote out the instructions. I didn't care how many cars they had. /MJG: Uh huh./ This, this boy that was firing for me that night, and he was road foreman down in Russell, he rode with me, and I showed him how to use all of these little tricky things. And, ah, he was later sent to Huntington as road foreman. And, he told me that he released the brakes on 250 going down Scarry Hill over here in St. Albans, and he had an official air brake car on the rear end.

MJG: Now, was this Ted DiAlbi?

JCN: Ted DiAlbi. That was one of the things that I developed on railroad that helped them out. Used to work around up at Columbus an awful lot. We had an awful lot of trouble around Columbus between there and Toledo. /MJG: Why?/ Trains braking into in two, and they'd put the brakes on and break into in two. /MJG: Uh huh./ Tried to teach them how to do it, but they, they, ah, finally got around where they could do it. Those that had nerve enough to try it. Some of them wouldn't try it, you know. Sort of weak minded and afraid (laughter) they'd get in trouble. I was always sort of progressive in that respect. I, old Dizzy Dean used to say that, ah, if you can do something and tell about it, and you're not bragging, and, ah, I was considered a pretty first-rate engineer.

MJG: Uh huh. Well, was the shift then to air brakes difficult? /JCN: Huh?/ Was the shift to air brakes difficult for you back in 1941?

JCN: No, no, no, they was right down my alley as far as that's concerned. The only thing that bothered me at the time was the getting up and talking before /MJG: Uh huh./ people, engine men and firemen /MJG: Uh huh./, officials but, ah.

MJG: Did that mean less travelling for you?

JCN: On, no, no, I travelled all the time, I travelled. But, ah, I didn't have much of that to do. World War II come along,

and we scrapped the old air brake cars. /MJG: Uh huh./ We never did rebuild or build another one and haven't to this day. So, what I would do, I would get out with the engine men and ride with them. Stay weeks at a time. I spent more time in Columbus, I guess, than any place on the railroad. Ride with them men up there and help them, educate them /MJG: Uh huh./ so they'd use these things.

MJG: How long did you hold that kind of job?

JCN: I retired on that.

MJG: So, you were actually riding on the railroad at the time you retired?

JCN: Oh, yeah.

MJG: An an air brakeman. Did you find that that was a difficult job as you, as you got older?

JCN: No, no, I loved it.

MJG: Would you still be doing it now?

JCN: Yeah.

MJG: Well, that's wonderful.

JCN: Now, I said, yeah, ah, they would have, they would have taken me off I imagine.

MJG: I mean, if the choice was yours.

JCN: If I had to life my life over and, ah, conditions was the same, I'd do exactly the way I did /MJG: Uh huh./ before. I love it. Running a locomotive was, ah, was work to some people /MJG: Uh huh./, and that was just a lot of fun for me. Of course, I had to work hard. /MJG: Uh huh./ But, ah.

MJG: Well, since you're retired, you've taken up a very interesting hobby. I was wondering if you could tell us a bit about it. You've become quite an accomplished painter I find.

JCN: Well, I tell you, when I was, ah, before I started to kindergarten